

Virginia Feral Hog Stakeholder Group

Newsletter

Issue 1



Greetings

Hello and greetings fellow stakeholders. It has been a while since our well-attended and very successful first stakeholder meeting last September in Sandston. For those who attended, we appreciate you being there and the information and discussion you provided. For those who could not make it, we hope to see you at future meetings and always welcome your input. This effort has been the response to a growing problem with increasing feral hog populations across the Commonwealth in the past few years. Unfortunately, we are receiving new reports almost monthly. See page 6 for our latest range maps.

The successes and progress made to date has been possible because of the current leadership of the feral hog initiative, found both within the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) through our internal Feral Hog Committee (consisting of 4 regional coordinators and a committee chair) and the external committee, which included representatives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Wildlife Services (USDA-WS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and the Virginia Farm Bureau. We have all been in the trenches trying to figure out ways to address this growing problem for the past three years.

We are currently working with our publication and design shop on a new “campaign slogan” to accompany our feral hog work. We want a slogan and an image to use that Virginians could easily identify with. While our graphic is still under development, we have decided on the slogan:

“Not Here, Not in Virginia!”

We plan to use this with forthcoming information and outreach efforts as soon as this summer. Stay tuned!

Partnership is Paramount

Throughout this work, one common theme has been apparent: we cannot do it alone. We need to invite all stakeholders, agricultural producers and agencies, private landowners, timber industry representatives, natural resource agencies, non-

governmental conservation organizations, hunters, and wildlife enthusiasts alike, to come to the table, voice their opinions, and work with us to successfully tackle all issues pertaining to feral hog control. It will take a combined effort by all to succeed.

If you’re new to this topic or just need a refresher, information about all of our efforts and materials you can use with your agencies and organizations may be found on the VDGIF website at [http://www.dgf.virginia.gov/wildlife/feral-hogs/](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/feral-hogs/).

(Continued on next page)

Inside this issue:

<i>Stakeholder Meeting Summary</i>	2
<i>Current Work / Federal Partners</i>	3
<i>Moving Forward</i>	4
<i>Inside Story</i>	3
<i>Inside Story</i>	4
<i>Stakeholder List</i>	5
<i>Latest Range Maps</i>	6

We hope you enjoy this newsletter, which we plan to issue quarterly. Please send any comments, suggestions, news, or any other updates regarding feral hogs to Aaron.Proctor@dgif.virginia.gov. He can be reached at 804-829-6580.

Continued from Page 1...

We strongly encourage you to explore the information there to ensure that you're fully informed about the on-going work and, most importantly, the many issues surrounding the control of feral hogs in Virginia.

The meeting in Sandston was our kick-off of this endeavor. We think, as did you, that it was a successful and critical first step. This newsletter is intended to communicate what we learned at that meeting; update you on where we are now; and provide information about what we are planning moving forward. The VDGIF expects to update you at least semi-annually with a newsletter like this one, but will also share shorter

e-mail communications with you in the intervening quarters. We hope that you'll use this as a means of sharing your own information, successes, or challenges with the broader community by sending your updates to Aaron Proctor (Aaron.Proctor@dgif.virginia.gov) by June 30, September 30, December 31, and March 31.

Please never hesitate to get involved and, most importantly, stay up-to-date and communicate!



***We will not succeed
without a combined effort
from all stakeholders!***

September 18, 2013 Stakeholder Meeting Summary

We received a tremendous amount of information and feedback in Sandston and would like to share some of the more common themes and concerns below. This list is certainly not exhaustive! If your comment isn't specifically noted below, do not worry, we have all of your comments and share a common concern for them all.

Comments/Concerns:

Natural resource damage and degradation: impacts to wildlife habitat, competition for habitat resources, threatened and endangered species concerns, and potential wildlife disease implications.

Environmental concerns: water quality, stream and wetland impacts.

Agricultural damage and disease concerns: impacts to crops, livestock safety and production, damage to infrastructure, and potential negative impacts to livestock industry that regulations on feral hogs may impart to hog producers.

Timber industry impacts: habitat degradation, tree seedling destruction, managing feral hog hunting and control on timber lands.

Landowner concerns: destruction of property in all forms, legalities of harvesting hogs of unknown origin

(feral versus livestock animals)

Cultural resources: threats to historic structures and properties (archeology, infrastructure, cemeteries, etc.)

Implications to recreational hunting: creating divides among our sportsmen, potentially casting a negative spotlight on hog hunters, and how to keep selective and successful removal efforts from promoting hog hunting within Virginia.

National security risks: implications of damage to infrastructure on our state's military bases and interference with military training (presently a real concern on at least a couple of installations)

Public safety risks: human and domestic pet disease concerns, runway safety concerns at airports, etc.

Public infrastructure and costs: impacts to utilities, cost of damage to insurance industry and end-user implications, revenue losses from damage on natural resource recreation on public and private lands, costs to outdoor activities such as golf, camping, etc.

Natural resource agency staffing and personnel concerns: staffing, budgeting, and equipment issues with regards to control efforts, ability to mobilize resources quickly to address feral hog populations.

Regulatory issues: We must work to

build or strengthen existing regulations and statutes pertaining to swine in Virginia (complications to agricultural production, definitions in distinguishing feral versus domestic swine, ownership, etc.)

Education and outreach initiatives: A huge priority for success, we must explore all possible venues for educating stakeholders, citizens, landowners, elected officials, and sportsmen.

Control techniques and methods: What works? What methods make the problem worse? How do we educate? How do we fund efforts and who carries it out? Aerial gunning (shooting from aircraft) is a very successful method in other states but unfortunately is currently illegal in Virginia, even for VDGIF and USDA-WS staff.

We summarized over 15 pages of notes from our breakout discussions in the days following our Sandston meeting, and it seemed apparent that all stakeholders agreed that (1) we have a big and growing problem, and (2) we must all take action.

Current Work

Defining a Feral Hog: One of the most significant problems we've identified is being able to clearly define exactly *what* a feral hog is in Virginia. If you were present in Sandston, you'll remember that it isn't easy and involves coordination across various state agencies. The Board of Game and Inland Fisheries has advertised a proposed regulation change that exempts free-roaming or wild swine from our domestic swine designation. **Please view and provide comment on 4VAC15-20-50 [here](#). We need your support!** We think that this proposed regulation will help clarify what a feral hog is for our sportsmen, landowners, and our legal system when issues and questions arise.

Feral Hog Control: The VDGIF recently entered into an agreement with USDA-WS in Virginia to fund a statewide feral hog control program, where we will co-sponsor a project to eradicate select populations of feral hogs in Virginia. We are currently working with USDA-WS staff on a Feral Hog Operational Plan for Virginia that will guide how we allocate resources, prioritize efforts on the ground, and form a system for prioritizing different feral hog populations in Virginia as we begin our control efforts. We cannot tackle all populations at once; hence, we need to form guiding principles that take into account feasibility of success, post-effort monitoring, landowner permission and consent, socio-economic impacts and factors, as well as human population concerns. When dealing with an invasive land mammal that can literally live

almost anywhere, there are many legal factors that can impact our ability for control on the ground.

Outreach: Since September, the VDGIF staffs have presented to the Virginia Forestry Association's Sustainable Forestry Committee and the Virginia Association of Consulting Foresters regarding feral hog efforts. In addition, we have made presentations at the Small Farm Family Conference and the Virginia Environmental Educator's Conference. The list of groups we've presented to grows almost weekly. Requests for feral hog information and requests for speakers to present to groups are beginning to roll in, which must mean we are starting to gain momentum in getting our message out. This is great news! We have also had an information booth at the Virginia Pork Industry Association and Virginia Farm Bureau annual conventions. On March 14, one of our feral hog committee members gave an on-camera interview to WTVR6 in Richmond regarding feral hogs and growing concerns in Virginia. The media interest was spawned by the reported 500lb hog harvested recently in North Carolina by a hunter, but the WTVR6 reporter instead chose to focus on the problems and issues regarding feral hogs on the landscape and not sensationalize one animal killed in another state. Hat's off to good reporting and helping us spread our message! If you need a presenter to speak about feral hogs to your agency or organization, please contact Aaron.Proctor@dgif.virginia.gov.

Monitoring: On February 1st, two of our biologists took advantage of a rare and significant snowfall in Virginia Beach and conducted a helicopter survey over Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge and adjoining False Cape State Park. They used this flight to assess the remaining feral hog population following control programs in recent years. Viewing hogs in open marsh-land habitat is easy, but the snow cover made it easy even through forested cover from 100 feet of altitude. During the survey, biologists observed four different groups of feral hogs comprising 20 animals in all. They were able to hover over each group at about 50 feet and clearly observe hogs before the animals fled. Needless to say, if aerial gunning was lawful, it would have resulted in removal of many, if not all, of hogs observed that day. Food for thought!



Helicopters greatly aid in the surveillance of feral hogs. Aerial gunning from helicopters has shown to be a more efficient and cost-effective control technique than trapping in many states.

From our Federal Partners

USDA—The USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has launched a national initiative to manage feral swine and their impacts in coordination with Tribes, state, and local agencies and organizations. The Wildlife Services (WS) Program within APHIS is the lead federal program under this initiative. Program activities will be implemented in all or most States and territories where feral swine

occur. In Virginia, USDA-WS is partnering with the VDGIF to coordinate feral swine management and disease surveillance in the Commonwealth. Preliminary efforts are underway to locate and better define populations of feral swine and to identify affected landowners. WS biologists will work to remove swine from affected areas where possible and test feral swine for diseases that may affect domestic

herds. More information on APHIS' feral hog initiative may be found by clicking [here](#).

USFWS—The biological staff at the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge continue feral hog trapping and removal efforts in 2014. Hogs have been removed as part of an annual public hunt since 1986, and actively trapped and removed by Refuge staff since 2011. A Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries capture-mark-recapture study conducted from 2005 through 2009 provided thorough population information for controlling the spread of the species on the Refuge and adjacent False Cape State Park.

An aerial survey conducted by VDGIF biologists in early February 2014 revealed a group of four hogs on Refuge land that included three large adults

and one juvenile. Three traps in that vicinity were first baited with whole corn on February 5th. Photos taken by motion sensor cameras at those three traps confirmed the VDGIF aerial survey results. The first feral hog visit to a trap occurred on February 9th and the first entry into a trap took place on February 20th. All Refuge traps were set on February 27th after regular hog entries into the three traps was confirmed. The next morning, with the help of VDGIF biologists, three trapped hogs were removed. A pregnant sow and juvenile sow were found in one trap, and an adult boar was in a second trap. Refuge biologists continue monitoring and baiting all three traps to remove the fourth hog, suspected to be another pregnant sow.



Feral hogs entering False Cape State Park from North Carolina. Work is currently being done to eradicate this Back Bay population of hogs down to the state line.

Photo: David Bishop, USFWS

USFS—On April 3, 2014, representatives from the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests, USDA-WS, and Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries met in Roanoke to discuss collaborative efforts towards controlling invasive feral hogs in Virginia. A short and long term strategy was discussed, including efforts to collaboratively trap known feral hog infestations on Forest Service lands this year, as well as continued participation in VDGIF's stakeholder process developing a statewide plan addressing feral hog issues in the Commonwealth.



*Feral hogs entering a trap at Back Bay NWR.
Photo: Karen Beatty, USFWS*

Moving Forward

Our efforts are gaining ground and gaining attention. The VDGIF staffs, along with USDA-WS, have received dozens of requests for interviews from newspaper, television, and radio media outlets in recent months. We are now getting asked frequently to present information on feral hogs to civic leagues, school groups, Master Naturalist chapters, hunting organizations, and even political organizations. An important focus in our partnership is to streamline the flow of information and education. We are working with biologists in other states

on successful means to disseminate information using tools such as video plugs, billboards, official Agency fliers, and even social media outlets. Some internal funding will help fulfill these ideas, but we hope you'll help us by using your own tools and outlets. We have learned from other states and from our own work here that, despite our best efforts on the ground, we can only go so far without reaching out to our stakeholders and ensuring that information, education and outreach is a substantial part of our initiative.

Many Virginians are hearing our message that "feral hogs are bad," but some aren't truly grasping the idea that recreational sport hunting does not control the problem. Those individuals don't understand that, in almost all cases, it makes the problem worse. For instance, we routinely get requests for information on hog hunting and where to hunt them. To address this, we have written a "Virginia Feral Hog Hunting FAQ," now found on our web site [here](#).

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VDGIF feral hog website:
<http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/feral-hogs/>

USDA-APHIS feral hog website:
Click [Here](#).

Stakeholder groups at September 2013 Meeting in Sandston:

Conservation Management Institute of Virginia Tech
Dominion
Grayco Inc.
Hancock Forest Management
Murphy-Brown LLC
National Park Service
National Wild Turkey Federation
Revivicor Inc.
The Forestland Group
The Nature Conservancy
The Ruffed Grouse Society
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Marine Corps
U.S. Navy
USDA Veterinary Services
USDA Wildlife Services
Virginia Agribusiness Council
Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Virginia Chapter of The Wildlife Society
Virginia Deer Hunters Association
Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation
Virginia Department of Forestry
Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries
Virginia Department of Health
Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Virginia Farm Bureau
Virginia Forest Products Association
Virginia Forestry Association
Virginia Hunting Dog Alliance
Virginia Nuisance Wildlife Control Operators Association
Virginia Outdoor Writers Association
Virginia Pork Industry Association
Virginia Tech Agricultural Research Extension Center
Westervelt Corporation
Wildlife Foundation of Virginia

Continued from Page 4...

If you don't think that the hog hunting culture is growing in Virginia, see this recent link that popped up on the internet on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6G6NUV1KlcM>

Note that, despite mention was made that feral hogs are bad in general, the hunters stated that it "sure is a lot of fun." As a matter of fact, they stated it was "a lot of fun" multiple times. As long as hog hunting is fun and available, we will continue to fight an uphill battle. In a bit of good news, New York State recently took a very proactive stance against feral hogs by illegalizing recreational sport hunting and recreational trapping. See story details here: http://www.syracuse.com/outdoors/index.ssf/2014/04/dec_bans_hunting_and_trapping_of_wild_boar_in_new_york.html.

If you were in attendance and your organization missed this list we apologize and please notify Aaron.Proctor@dgif.virginia.gov. Thanks!

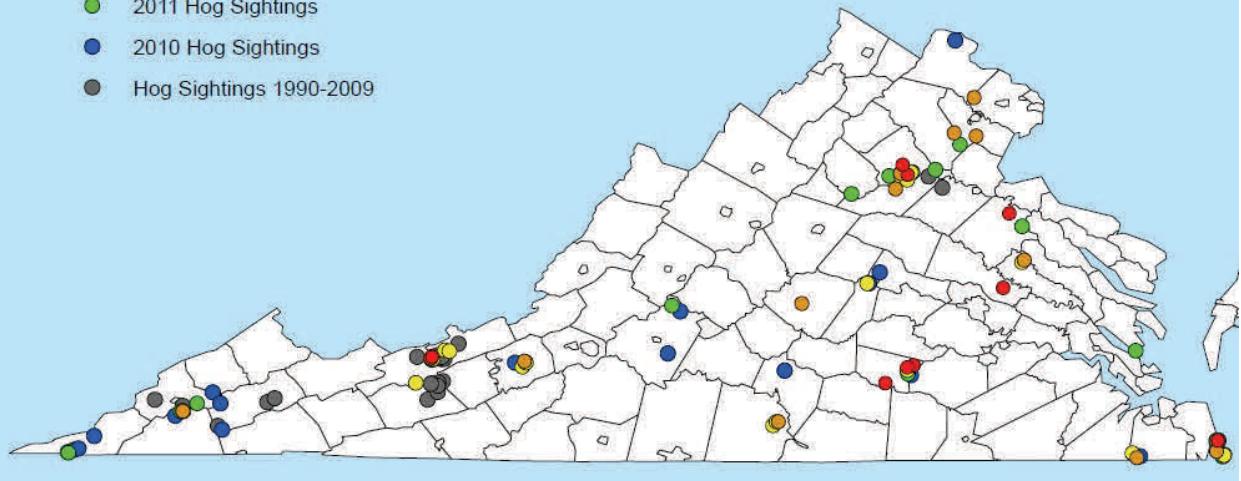
We invited representatives from many more organizations than the list above. Please help us share our message to increase interest.

If you know of anyone or any groups that should be included on this list please let us know!

Feral Hog *Sus scrofa* Locations in Virginia

Legend

- 2014 Hog Sightings
- 2013 Hog Sightings
- 2012 Hog Sightings
- 2011 Hog Sightings
- 2010 Hog Sightings
- Hog Sightings 1990-2009

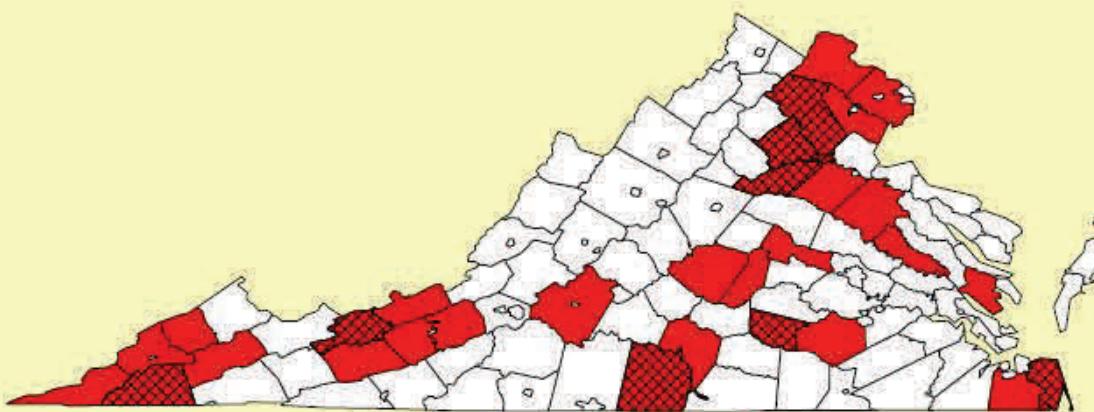


USDA APHIS WS VA & VDGIF
03/24/14

0 25 50 100 Miles

Counties Occupied by Feral Hogs (*Sus scrofa*)

- ▨ Breeding Populations
- Occupied Counties



Brandon K. Hofer USDA APHIS Wildlife Services
04/10/2014

0 25 50 100 Miles